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I know this sounds a very stark way of putting it but this is like a poker game for very high stakes. For the Labour Party to be sensible and make the right choices, of course it has to be worried, but it also has to be worried. There is something so ridiculous about jansoning NL just when the brand has so obviously won the political debate: there is a wilfulness about some of the PLP that has to be challenged by others recognising the consequences of it and pushing back hard, because their survival rests on it.

2. The Tories

That leads on to how to deal with a resurgent Tory Party. At the moment the media have a very simple conclusion: we're divided and for that the Tories are renewing. But this is extraordinarily superficial. We are only divided because we are divided, unified around NL: we would be setting a clear direction. The Tories are renewing but only by going through the same process as NL except without setting a new agenda. They are discarding but not creating. Underneath the surface there are a welter of policy contradictions and if we do offer a mass of future policy choices, if we are divided or can plausibly be taken as abandoning NL, none of this matters. The public, with media backing, will just default to the Tories.

On the assumption, however that we avoid this trap, this is how we should approach them:

- (i) proclaim confidently that NL has won the battle of ideas, that the Tories are in mid, long-term ideological retreat and that instead of

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fearing the Tory advance, we should see it as a sign that we have indeed changed the political landscape.

- (ii) in doing this, we should push them to the point where they start to feel internal heat. OK for the moment, what what support works for them and then right-wing will keep silent. But their right isn't like our left. They believe they can win from the right in a way Labour could never do from the left and they are correct in that. Properly done, their right could become very agitated.
- (iii) we say that, however, the coming battle is not about who has been correct in the past but who will be right in the future and that means NL itself renewing and moving up a gear. And it does this, not presentationally which is impossible, given the length of time in office, but substantively, in policy terms.

The more I reflect, the more I am sure the key is to get to the truth. The Tories know why they lost in political terms. But they don't yet know what to do in policy terms. Their Big Idea is, at present to accept our Big Idea, ie New Labour but give it a different face.

- (iv) simultaneously, however, with all the above, we point out anything the Tories do that is either the proof or misjudged by we can say:
- they talk about the future but their policy position on academic selection in schools is a withdrawal from the

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European Tory Party, etc. are on analysis the past not the future.

or

- on the environment or ID cards and crime, they are misjudged.

And in addition, it could be that they change policy positions so often that their consistency and 'flip-flop' becomes an issue.

My point is: for the moment, we run (i)-(ii). We keep in reserve (iv) once the picture becomes clearer.

And, above all, we evince a *provisional* attitude that this is a long game. There is a fashion for DC but that is a long way from becoming a settled conviction to remove a Government that even he now has to admit has forced the Tories to change their line. We welcome the contest.

None of this means we do not attack them as, in the end, reverting to Tory type. I am not sure they have really changed. Their backbenches, especially the younger element, don't look reconstructed to me. Their shift is a present tactical not based on belief as was the case with NL.

So, at some point, we need to get to the place where we publicise a risk in choosing them. Here I agree with GB. But people need to take aim to get there and be shown that's where they should be: not bludgeoned into it now.

45 Sent 2006 01 01 10:00 (copy to GB)